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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 003669

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SUBJECT: NATIONAL GUARD CHIEF ON COUNTERTERRORISM, THE
REGION, SUCCESSION, AND DEMOCRATIC REFORM

REF: KUWAIT 3523

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RICHARD LEBARON FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d)

1. (C) Summary: During an August 15 meeting, National Guard Commander Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah told the Ambassador that fighting poverty and illiteracy will help combat terrorism and that the security situation in Iraq will improve once the Iraqis advance economically. On Iran and Syria, Shaykh Salem stated that neither country has a direct impact on Iraq, but that economic gains by Iraq could cause its neighbors' citizens to agitate for change within their own countries. On succession, he stated, in very general terms, that the ruling family was looking at possible near term solutions to address the poor health and advanced ages of the Amir and the Crown Prince. On the Ambassador's question of democratic reform, Shaykh Salem said parliamentary constituencies were too small and that redistricting was coming soon. End Summary.

Security and Counterterrorism

2. (C) Shaykh Salem Al-Ali Al-Salem Al-Sabah, in his first meeting with the Ambassador on August 15, stated that eliminating illiteracy and poverty would help in the fight against terrorism. He said the GOK was working to educate its young people on the U.S. role in the 1991 Gulf War and to teach them Kuwaiti culture. Commenting that the Kuwaiti people, in general, appreciate the presence of U.S. forces in country, he said if there were any negative statements made in the press about the U.S. military, it was the result of politicians trying to maintain a high public profile. The Ambassador, who was accompanied by the RSO, Acting OMC-K Chief, and Poloff, asked for an increase in counterterrorism cooperation and, citing Saudi Arabia as an example of enhanced c/t cooperation. He said that a sustained and concentrated counterterrorism effort was required in Kuwait and he encouraged Shaykh Salem to help make that possible.

Iraq, Security, and Agriculture

3. (C) Shaykh Salem explained, in a recurring theme during the meeting, that Kuwaitis were unlikely candidates for extremism because they had a good life and that the average Kuwaiti salary was 6,000 Kuwaiti dinar, approximately 20,000 USD. Shaykh Salem commented that if U.S. forces could help Iraqis reach a higher level of income then the situation would stabilize. Noting that the Iraqi manpower was very capable and that Iraq had ignored its agricultural roots during Saddam's rule, Shaykh Salem advised that Iraqis needed to focus on agriculture rather than on having a large army. On a similar theme, he stated that the recent border dispute at Umm Qasr (reftel), which he described as "minor," was a result of Iraqis following anyone who paid them 20 USD. He added that security, both internal and on the border, was key to stability within Iraq.

Iran and Syria

4. (C) When asked about Iran, Shaykh Salem responded that neither Iran nor Syria had a major impact on what was going on in Iraq. He added that if the people of Iraq were able to enjoy a comfortable financial life then Iranians and Syrians might compare their lifestyles and rise up and revolt in order to gain the same. "The people," Shaykh Salem added, "will look to their neighbors to see what they have and they will search for something similar in their own countries."

Who's Next?...

5. (C) Asked directly by the Ambassador about the succession process, Shaykh Salem responded that the issue was being raised within the family and that they were looking for a solution "in the near future." Referring to Article 4 of the Kuwaiti Constitution which covers succession rules, Shaykh Salem stated that the procedure is very clear, mandating the nomination of the Crown Prince and the confirmation of the Amir. (Note: Shaykh Salem has been mentioned by some contacts as having ambitions for the top position. In October, in

recognition of his position in the family, he was given the title of "Your Highness." Nevertheless, his age, 81, and his obesity (poloff estimates that he is over 320 lbs although he otherwise appears to be in good health) makes his selection as Amir unlikely. End Note)

Reform and Parliament

16. (C) In response to the Ambassador's suggestion that it was time for more democratic reform, specifically regarding the number of constituencies for parliamentary elections, Shaykh Salem agreed stating that the number of constituencies would be lowered from 25 to 10, the same number for Municipal Council elections. Shaykh Salem added that the number of representatives in Parliament would not change and that the redistricting itself was up to Parliament. The Shaykh pointed out that the Kuwaiti people did not fully agree on some reforms, for example the existence of political parties or the number of newspapers allowed to print. He stressed that it was Parliament that could make the change, as the voice of the people, and he "hoped" it would do the right thing.

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